



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

SNAKE RIVER BASIN OFFICE

1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368 • Boise, Idaho 83709

(208) 378-5243 • FAX (208) 378-5262

Contact: Edna Rey-Vizgirdas - (208) 378-5243
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RARE FERN CONSIDERED FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT PROTECTION

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today it will conduct a comprehensive review of the slender moonwort (*Botrychium lineare*), a small perennial fern found in three western states, to determine whether the species should be protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The Service made the determination in response to a petition filed by the Biodiversity Legal Foundation last July. Under the Act, the Service was required to review the petition to decide whether it contains substantial information supporting a full review of the species.

"Service biologists found that the information in the petition warrants a full review. They will assess the decline of the slender moonwort, collect information on other locations where it may still survive, determine threats to the plant and review activities that might affect the populations we know are out there," said Anne Badgley, Regional Director of the Service's Pacific Region.

If the Service decides to propose the species for listing, the public will have an opportunity to comment on the proposal before a final decision is made.

The slender moonwort once existed in most western states and in parts of Canada but now is limited to five small areas. Two populations grow in eastern Oregon in Wallowa County; two populations occur along a toll road in El Paso County, Colorado; and one population grows in Glacier National Park in Montana. These populations range from two plants to 53 plants. The species can live in a variety of habitats such as meadows with tall grass, beneath trees in wooded areas and on limestone cliff shelves at higher elevations.

Biologists have determined the slender moonwort is threatened by fire suppression, which results in uncontrolled growth of non-native plants, and by ground-disturbing activities such as live-stock grazing, mining, urban development, timber harvest, road-building and various types of recreation. Remaining populations of the slender moonwort are so small that a natural disaster such as fire or drought also could destroy them.

Plants play an important role in development of crops that resist disease, insects, and drought. At least 25 percent of prescription drugs contain ingredients derived from plant compounds, including medicine used to treat cancer, heart disease, juvenile leukemia, and malaria, as well as that used to assist organ transplants. Plants are also used to develop natural pesticides.

For further information on slender moonwort (*Botrychium lineare*), contact Robert Ruesink, supervisor, or Edna Rey-Vizgirdas, botanist, at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709 (telephone 208-378-5243).

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fish and wildlife management assistance offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.